

Organization Snapshot

Escondido Citizens Patrol
Year Started: 1999
Number of Members: 47
City Population: 140,000
Website:
www.nacop.org/escondido

Provide an overview of your community, where the C.O.P. group operates (population, size, etc)

Escondido, California, was founded in 1888 during a period when agriculture was its major business and the community had a population of less than 800. Escondido, which means "Hidden Valley", is located in north San Diego County about 18 miles from the coast and 30 miles from downtown San Diego. The present population is close to 140,000.

Who started the C.O.P organization and why?

The Neighborhood Empowerment Organization (NEO) started in San Diego and later was formed in Escondido in 1993 as Citizens Patrol where it was in operation from 1993 - 1999. In December 1999, the first Volunteer Patrol Academy graduated and came under the umbrella of the Escondido Police Department. In 2002, it was renamed Volunteers In Police Service (VIPS). The organization was started to augment law enforcement officers in times of emergencies, basically serve as "eyes and ears" of the Police Department.

How many people were initially involved and what did the organization look like then?

The initial academy consisted of approximately 15 personnel with a Volunteer Coordinator in charge of the program.

What were your initial goals, crime reduction only, assist law enforcement with traffic, etc.

The purpose of the VIPS program was to provide support of non-enforcement personnel throughout the police department. Volunteer duties consist of patrolling the City during the day and night; manning the Mobile Storefront; the

A discussion with Officer Lew Shaver, Volunteer Patrol Coordinator for the Escondido Police Department. *By Arthur Femister*



Pictured above: Group photo with the Members of the Escondido, California, Police Volunteer Patrol with Police Chief Duane White, LT. Holly Merkel and Volunteer Coordinator Officer Lew Shaver.
Photo by: Dennis Bailey

Downtown Storefront; graffiti documentation; assisting with crime prevention; traffic control; performing clerical duties in records, investigations and property; assisting in control of fires; patrol malls; computer data entry; mail runs to the courthouse and DA; assist the radar trailer technician and other specified duties as assigned.

What types of challenges did you face initially and what are they now if any?

The initial challenges were getting the administration to buy into the fact that we needed uniforms, badges, and vehicles to fulfill the duties of the Volunteer Patrol Unit.

If you have patrol cars, what was your first patrol car, (make, model, condition, etc.)

Our first patrol cars were 1987 Chevrolet Caprices of which we had 3 in barely running condition. They were hand-me-downs from the regular police force.

What does your Citizen Patrol car fleet look like now, how many cars, what type, etc.

We now have two 2002 Chevy Impalas and have access to another 2001 Chevy Impala

Abatement Vehicle that was purchased utilizing an Abatement Grant to remove abandoned vehicles from the road. The patrol cars are equipped with the police package, including radios, spotlights and overhead light bars.

What type of uniforms do you have? Polo shirts? Sheriff's uniforms? Combination?

We are furnished a VIP Handbook, name tag, white shirts with patches (one long sleeve and one short sleeve), metal badges, blue pants with belts, baseball hats and a windbreaker jacket paid for by the department. We are looking into the possibility of having a casual uniform to include polo shirts to be used for call-out, etc.

How many Citizen Patrol volunteers do you actively have now?

We have approximately 47 Volunteers on our roster at this time.

What type of equipment do your members carry? Flashlights? Cuffs? Pepper Spray? etc.

Our equipment consists of radios with microphones, flashlights, whistles and personal cell phones for use on patrol.

Where is your Citizen Patrol office located?

We have a volunteer desk located in the main Police Station which is in an office shared with our Graffiti Officer, Special Events Coordinator and Alarm Specialist plus our Volunteer Coordinator occupies a desk in the COPPS Office. We also have two volunteer desks at the Downtown Storefront at 235 East Grand.

How do you communicate between cars, volunteers and Law Enforcement? Cell phones, radios?

We communicate with standard police radios to dispatch and between cars.

How do you dispatch Citizen Patrol volunteers to accident scenes or calls for LE assistance?

The main dispatch center dispatches volunteers to accidents or if the volunteers hear the accident broadcasted, they proceed to the accident scene to assist.

What type on initial training do Citizen Patrol volunteers get and is there any ongoing training?

Initially, we are required to attend a comprehensive 80-hour volunteer citizen law enforcement academy. We are also required to complete an 8-hour Citizen's Awareness Class, an 8-hour CPR class and First Aid training. We continue to have a business meeting and training meeting each month. Our business meeting is the second Tuesday of each month and our training meeting is the fourth Tuesday of each month.

Do you offer any Special Services to the public or LE such as fingerprinting, vacation checks, traffic control, crime scene control, stolen car checks, etc?

We offer fingerprinting, bicycle licensing, vacation house checks, traffic control, crime scene control, graffiti abatement, assisting investigators at crime or accident scenes; assisting with vehicle abatement program; writing handicapped and specific citations; clerical assistance in records, investigations and property; assist with COPPS; assist with

DUI checkpoints and safety checkpoints, assist with bicycle licensing; assist with bicycle safety programs; assist with Juvenile Diversion Program; Code Enforcement; patrol City parks, schools and churches; assist with control of fires; citizens assist; assist Search and Rescue in locating missing persons; assist with gang enforcement; assist with jail-intake and booking procedures.



Pictured Above: Two members of the Escondido Police Volunteer Patrol work with a fellow Officer at a road closure during the devastating 2003 Wild Fires which took dozens of lives and hundreds of homes in San Diego County.

What are the qualifications to become a Citizen Patrol member and what type of background check do applicants go through?

The qualifications require applicants to submit an application, sign a waiver form, and commit to work a four-hour minimum requirement each week. The applicant must be between the ages of 21 - 100. Volunteers are interviewed, CII fingerprint searched; local and NCIC warrant check; credit check; personal reference check; previous and current employer checked, and a polygraph interview will be conducted for sensitive assignments.

What were your most current year's statistics such as amount of miles patrolled, total hours volunteered by all members, drop in crime rate due to C.O.P., specific crimes stopped in progress or caught?

Last year, the volunteers patrolled 12,442 miles in this diversified city of more than 140,000 people. The VIPS group handled 830 abandoned vehicles, 522 hotline calls, 383 code enforcement situations and 189 vacation checks at homes. They also issued 546 tickets while contacting 4,519 citizens. Specific crimes stopped were a rape suspect apprehended; taggers caught in the act and arrested; a citizen assist which resulted in the vehicle being stolen, driver being intoxicated and driver having a long rap sheet; volunteer finding a crime in progress and keeping the suspects under surveillance until an officer arrived; at a briefing patrol volunteers were informed to be on the lookout for a felony suspect - while on patrol, patrol volunteers identified the suspect and kept him under surveillance until an officer arrived and apprehended the suspect.

What is your number one ongoing challenge, assuming you have one?

Our ongoing challenge is to continue to keep our volunteers active and interested in the program.



Pictured Above: Escondido's volunteer patroller Carlos Aguilar gets back from patrol at the police storefront office in downtown Escondido.

How do you recruit new members and what is your average turn over of members?

We have had recruitment advertisements in the local newspapers and have found word-of-mouth to be a good means of advertising. We also receive a fair amount of new members from other local volunteer groups such as the Sheriff's department and CHP who want to lateral to our unit. Our average turn-over of members is approximately 10% a year.

How do you rate the overall acceptance of your C.P. group with the public and LE department?

Our overall acceptance with the public and the department is excellent and very positive and they are very appreciative of what we do.

If you could wave a "magic wand" and get whatever you wanted for your Citizen Patrol group, what one thing would you ask for?

We would ask for more vehicles, issued radio's and "Go" bags for the volunteers.

What are the most common issues/problems you face (if you wish to discuss this)?

Our most common issues involve the same as most departments which is helping our volunteers to better work together.

What is your annual operating budget in dollars, assuming you have one?

Our annual operating budget is determined by the police department. We save the city about \$250,000 a year with our volunteer services.

What special events do you provide support for such as High School football games, Fairs, Graduations, traffic control for Marathon's and clean up days, etc?

We provide support at some of the high school football games, graduations, fairs, traffic control, cruising grand night on Friday nights, parades, manning the downtown store front five days a week from 9 - 5.

Has any Citizen Patrol member ever been injured while performing their duties?

No Volunteer has ever been injured while on duty nor has any volunteer been involved in an auto accident while on duty.

How do you motivate, recognize and reward your Citizen Patrol Volunteers?

We get a lot of accolades, certificates and praises from the City, the community and our Police Officers. We are honored at a yearly banquet at an upscale country club.

FUTURE ADDITIONS:

At the time this profile was being produced, the Escondido Police Volunteers were in the process of having in-car Mobile Data Computers installed that will allow the Volunteers to access vehicle information and other basic data to help assist them with their patrol duties.

Each Volunteer is required to attend a four hour NCIC access class to learn the rules and regulations regarding the use of this information.

Most Significant Event

Our most significant event for our Volunteers was the wildland fire storms in October 2003 that hit our city hard along with many others in Southern California. The department recalled all Police Officers and Volunteers. The department went into 12 on 12 off scheduling. Many of the volunteers the first night put in 15-23 hours straight! Volunteers worked intersections, evacuations, evacuation areas, logistics, and the command center. Many volunteers acted as area coordinators to releave officers to work in the field. During the three days the fire hit our city, the majority of our volunteers were working 12 hour shifts on and off.



Pictured Above: Escondido Police Volunteers arriving at the Fifth Annual NACOP Conference in Southern California in September 2004.